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Foreword

In a time of rampant standardization of literacy education through government insistence of measurable performance outcomes in many countries, it is restorative to read Kate Pahl's and Jennifer Rowsell's new edition of *Literacy and Education*. Their book begins as it continues with a thought-provoking vignette written by a high school student, a survivor of the Haiti earthquake of 2010, who came to Princeton hopeful of studying at Rutgers University. His writing tells of privileges and silences, about places at the centre, places at the margins, about untold stories. Pahl and Rowsell populate their guide to the New Literacy Studies with students and teachers making meanings of and in their worlds. Importantly they show that developing literate repertoires involves complex relationships with identity, time, spaces and places – material and virtual.

Allan Luke wrote in the Foreword to the first edition in 2005 that *Literacy and Education* 'is a comprehensive introduction to social and cultural approaches to literacy' which leads us to young people and teachers negotiating the everyday worlds of classrooms and communities. This remains true of the new edition. Writing for teachers, Pahl and Rowsell cover significant theoretical and research terrain; they are flamboyant tour guides ranging far and wide in their treatment of ideas as diverse as *artifactual critical literacy*, *communities of practice*, *design literacies*, *discourse*, *figured worlds*, *genre theory*, *materiality*, *modal learning*, *multimodality* and more. I mean flamboyant in the best sense of this word – that is, they lead us with flair, colour and surprise. The last 50 years of the best of theory and research in literacy education (and what is emerging) are signalled in their glossary and introduced in the book! Their vignettes adroitly illustrate these new vocabularies, giving us alternative words and generative metaphors as antidotes to the sometimes depressing world of literacy education policy. Pahl and Rowsell re-energise the reader; their stories make you want to go back to the classroom, the library, the neighbourhood walk, the mall, the Internet – to watch how young people are making meaning and how teachers are approaching their pedagogies in these new times.

So why would teachers, early career and those all along the way, and teacher educators want to read such a book given that typical literacy policy agenda at this time require narrow approaches to literacy teaching and in some cases provide teachers with scripted curriculum? Pahl and Rowsell are generous tour guides offering teachers a rich intellectual journey into the world of New Literacy Studies, the work of seminal theorists such as Hymes, Heath, Street and Kress, to their own work and that of leading and emergent scholars. They introduce historical and contemporary research from literacy educators far and wide – from South Africa, to Canada, to Australia, the New Zealand and the United Kingdom – working in very different contexts with highly diverse students. They actively mediate and translate complex and rich ideas often through illustrative stories from their own and others' practice. Having worked with teacher-researchers for over three decades I see this as a book to be read in such collectives, shared with other teachers, as the impetus for classroom investigations. It is a text that opens up action and inquiry. The teachers with whom I have worked for some time do not avoid theory or research; instead they welcome it, finding that it provides rich nourishment in what is sometimes a barren educational landscape. However increasingly they are time-poor and somewhat exhausted by compulsory change initiatives and mandated literacy programs. This book is valuable offering to such practitioners. It offers tools to deconstruct different views of teaching and learning and to undertake ongoing research about their practices. Further it offers a persuasive rationale for including complex multimodal

approaches to literacy in today's globally mediated environments which young people must navigate.

For teacher educators *Language and Education* is a really useful resource as it helps tell the history of literacy education studies even as it invites new readers and new teachers into possible futures. The fascinating fragments from vignettes, classrooms and communities provide a conduit for examining complex theoretical perspectives, different paradigms and contemporary debates in literacy education. The theory boxes, reflections, activities, vignettes and questions are pedagogical tools, soundly underpinned with theory and not simply layout options. Having a comprehensive research-based text around which innovative pedagogies and classroom projects can be designed can facilitate the considerable identity work that new teachers need to undertake.

Importantly, given the demands of the times in terms of measurable standards, Pahl and Rowsell argue that 'it is possible to combine an understanding of literacy as a set of skills with an understanding of how we use literacy in everyday life'. Informed by inclusive models of literacy such as those conceptualised by Bill Green (including operational, cultural and critical dimensions) and Luke and Freebody's four resources approach addressing skills remains just one element of teachers' work, but not the whole deal. Pahl and Rowsell recognise the ways in which texts increasing frame and organise people's lives and invite teachers to use their own classroom materials, bookshelves and so on as a place to start in thinking about how texts capture 'traces of practice'.

A key idea that underlies much of the unique work accomplished by Pahl and Rowsell is that of artifactual literacies. The focus not only on different media and modes, as well various texts and genres, but also on the very objects or *stuff* that people use to make meaning – whether it is the craftwork done at home, the design work done by film-makers, the shoe-boxes re-decorated and story-filled and brought to school – as ethnographers of literacy they never take the everyday for granted. Rather in rendering it visible, they raise new questions for educators about curriculum design, what values are preferred. How to think critically about new domains of practice, in particular multimodal sites, is a really useful contribution for teachers who wish to incorporate digital communications and new media. Noting the dilemmas teachers face when out of school texts enter the classroom they demonstrate how the child's resources may act as an important interface between existing knowledge and experience and new academic discursive practices.

One of the most generative frames of reference over the past two decades for considering the learning assets in children's worlds beyond the school was developed by Luis Moll and colleagues (1992). Funds of knowledge are the resources shared in families and local communities. For example such knowledge may range from horticulture, cooking, mechanics, music, herbal medicine and so on. Such knowledges may be in various ways connected to the locality of the community. People make use of what they have to hand in similar ways to how children necessarily use the resources they have to make meaning in classrooms. The extent to which there is permeability between home and school worlds can help children to feel as though they belong and accomplish new learning. Pahl and Rowsell review recent related international research on the various ways in which parents in different communities support their children's literacy. They consider how schools could open their practices to allow for multilingual literacy events such as dual language story books. They also consider how teachers could be more open to learning from home practices for example to learn about how families engage with a range of technologies.

Increasingly scholars are recognising the need to go beyond their disciplines and to employ multiple research approaches to answer research questions. In this book we see the value of the careful ethnographic work which underpins the New Literacy Studies, the inclusion of teacher inquiry for social justice for which there is a long tradition in literacy studies (Rogers et al., 2009), plus the inclusion of new approaches such as Alison Clark's (2010) work with children and space which open up new frames of reference. The authors understand that what is needed is an ecological approach to the study of literacy, focussing on how people make meaning in relation to their own identities and localities with the resources at hand. This leads Pahl and Rowsell to suggest very creative projects for teachers to undertake at home and at school with respect to the ecologies of print-related objects in homes and schools which take into account the power relations that pertain to language and spatial practices. Teacher readers would benefit from reading this book in small study groups as it is designed to generate activity and inquiry, ideally where schools are 'hubs for research on literacy'.

New Literacy Studies researchers have always concerned themselves with context. Indeed a key assumption of their approach is the importance of situating literacy studies in connection with wider cultural practices and avoiding the assumption that literacy is what is taught and learned in school (Street & Street, 1991). Recently given features of the contemporary era in association with globalisation (mobility, environmental disasters, financial crises), literacy scholars have attended not only to context as a setting for the negotiation of practices, but to space and place as constitutive categories in their own right. Just as we understand that discourse is constitutive of identities –for example a 'refugee' in comparison to 'illegal' or 'alien', now literacy educators are looking again at spatial relationships and also at how places are made by people and how such relationships might afford new place-based critical literacies (Comber, 2010). Even in these words alone we can see how identity, power, space and place come together in our naming practices and legal discourses.

People's identities cannot be separated from the ways they engage in literate practices; their histories and present positioning in places and spatial relations infuse how they make sense of and compose texts. Their biographical resources are therefore crucial to what might be done in schools and other sites of learning. Yet over time people's interests and capabilities change as they connect with and take on new opportunities, thereby layering both identities and discursive resources. Schooled identities can allow for opening out and enriching of possibilities or they can lock people into different educational trajectories. Pahl and Rowsell invite us to look closely at the interpretive resources children have, to see multilingualism as an asset not a problem in learning to read. Their classrooms of tomorrow are rich with potential for teachers and children to research in various settings, to interrogate, to debate, to work collaboratively, to engage in intercultural communication. In short they would be developing complex dispositions towards inquiry, analysis, design and action. Literacy is not a discreet academic skill but part of a complex and dynamic learner repertoire (Comber, 2007; Janks, 2010).

In an era of ever-changing digital communications, audit cultures and high-stakes literacy assessment, it is more important than ever to create spaces where teachers can engage intellectually with the new demands of teaching literacy and the contradictions that lie in normative educational discourses. Abstract notions of performance tend to bracket out embodied people in particular places. So-called improvement in literacy becomes just a matter of investing in the right program or applying the correct techniques to solve the diagnosed problem. Meanwhile the real game, in the world beyond schooling, has moved on in terms of accessing design literacies and modal learning. There are real equity issues here as Pahl and Rowsell note. Wisely, they do not advocate for a lack of attention to traditional

literate practices such as composing well, however they argue cogently for an equal prioritisation of the complex semiotic repertoires upon which the full participation of citizens depends. They are aware that there is a danger in the contemporary moment of one kind of literacy – the old basics – being offered to poor, working-class and immigrant children under the auspices of education, whilst more affluent children assemble new digital media literacies at home and at school exponentially gaining an advantage over peers with less access to the newly dominant communication practices.

Literacy and education makes an important contribution to the field of literacy studies. I have described it here as a guide book because it tells us where we have been, outlines the features of where we are now and points the way for where we need to go as an educational community – teachers and researchers working together – committed to literacy education for social justice. Importantly as guides to the New Literacy Studies they offer hope for more equitable literacy learning, hope than in part emanates from the fresh perspective of their rich research repertoires which allow for new pedagogical designs, new literacies, and new ecologies.

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